

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on Hennepin County Sheriff's Office Decision to Move to Encrypted Radio System [Corrected]

October 18, 2019 (Minneapolis) - After a four-year process guided by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office User Advisory Board, which advises the Sheriff's Office on matters related to county-wide communications procedures and performance, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office Communications Division moved on an encrypted radio system on Wednesday. The chiefs of the dependent agencies were consulted and remain extremely supportive. While each city in the dispatch system brought requests to update their equipment to their respective city councils over the last four years, we recognize that we did not clearly communicate this change to the public before the new system went live.

This change was made for the protection of personal information, protecting police operations, and officer safety. In recent years, technology advances have increased the ability of all citizens to monitor police calls via readily available mobile apps. This has exposed sensitive data of citizens to potential harm on a daily basis. We believe the citizens of Hennepin County have a right to privacy, and an expectation that the information they give to 911 is private. When people call 911 to report domestic abuse, a suicide attempt, or other sensitive matter, they likely do not want others hearing their personal information. Likewise, when a 911 caller shares their address along with the location of a hidden house key or the code to a keypad entry system, they do not want that information broadcast to the public. However, this information needs to be broadcast to responding officers, and technology is allowing others to listen in to that information. Our mission is to protect the public. This includes protecting their data from those who might abuse it.

Similarly, mobile scanner apps have helped criminals around the country elude capture and put officers in danger by letting them monitor police response activity in real time. Scanner apps let listeners know where police are headed, giving criminals a chance to flee a crime scene, or an opportunity to arm themselves before police arrive.

We recognize that scanner apps are popular, and that most users have no malicious intentions for the information broadcast over them. However, there is no federal law that requires public access to police radio, and live broadcast offers law enforcement agencies no ability to redact sensitive information. The public will still be able to request recordings of 911 calls with sensitive data redacted via data practice requests.

We also recognize the interest of media in having access to police communications to ensure police transparency and accountability. We are working on a solution to provide needed access to police communications.

We welcome the public's comment on this issue.

This version corrects a typographical mistake in the previous release.

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